

THE
FIRST
PURITAN
CHURCH

ORGANIZED IN

NEW ENGLAND.

SALEM,

1634.

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Republ. from 78



AN ACCOUNT

OF THE

FIRST CHURCH

BUILT IN

SALEM, MASS.

1634.

SIXTH EDITION.

SALEM:

PUBLISHED BY THE ESSEX INSTITUTE.

1893.



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INTRODUCTION.

The first church in New England was at Plymouth but that church was not organized by the Pilgrims here but before they came to this country. The Puritan church here in Salem was therefore the first church organization formed and gathered on New England soil.

The church was formed Aug. 6, 1629, although the pastor and teacher were chosen and dedicated July 20th. The frame for the first building used especially for worship was erected in 1634, and it stood at or near the northeasterly corner of the present structure of the First Church on Essex street. George Norton, a carpenter who came over with Higginson in 1629, is supposed to have been the builder. In 1639 the building was enlarged. A facsimile of the contract for this enlargement can be seen at the secretary's room of the Institute. In 1670 when a second edifice was built the original building was reserved by the town "for the town's use to build a skoole house and watch house." It was so used until 1760 but from that time the history of the building is only established by tradition. Thorn-

dike Proctor a man of note in town affairs, selectman, etc., is supposed to have bought the oldest part of the building and transported it to his own land in the rear of Boston street where it was used as a tavern or house of refreshment. In 1864 Mr. Francis Peabody interested himself in looking up the history of the building and through his liberality it was removed to its present location in the rear of Plummer Hall. This site having been secured by Mr. George A. Ward, a warm friend of the Institute's and to whose exertions are due the preservation of many valuable historical relics. The frame was restored to its original mortises and placed within a good external covering. The following extracts from reports of committees of the Essex Institute give a description of the building and everything known regarding it.

EXTRACTS

FROM A REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE
ON THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE TRADITION OF THE
FIRST CHURCH BUILT IN 1634.

[READ AT A MEETING OF THE INSTITUTE, APRIL 26, 1860.]

* * * * *

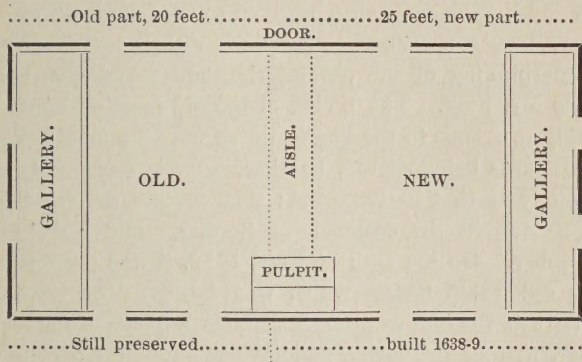
The first question appears to be, Is this the frame of the first Church, erected in 1634? Is there in records and reliable tradition, evidence to warrant a belief that it is?

Let us first look into the evidence from the records, then into the tradition and, lastly, into the internal proofs from the building itself.

We have the assurance from the records that the congregation, having worshipped from 1629 to 1634 in an *unfinished* building, of one story, agreed, the latter year, with Mr. Norton, to build a suitable meeting-house, which should not exceed the

amount of £100. In 1638, four years afterwards, "bills were paid for daubing and glazing this house." The next year, in February, 1639, an agreement was made with John Pickering to build a "Meeting-house," but from what follows, and in which your Committee coincide, it was only an *addition* to the old house; for the town voted, on the 31st December, 1638, only two months previous, to build an *addition* to the meeting-house. The agreement with Pickering was, "that it be twenty-five feet long, the breadth of the old building, with a gallery answerable to the former, one catted chimney of twelve feet long, the back whereof to be brick or stone, to have six sufficient windows, two on each side, and two at the end, and a pair of stairs to ascend the galleries, suitable to the former." Here, only *one* end is mentioned, and a *Meeting-house* would of course have had *two* ends. Thus we have the information, also, that the first building had a gallery.

This *addition* made the building twice its former size, exclusive of the five feet which was necessarily reserved for a pulpit, on the side, between the galleries, and a door opposite with an aisle, in the middle, a style of church building which continued from that until a very late period. The whole length of the building then was forty-five feet, as here represented in the following plan:



In 1647, “Mr. George Curwin and William Lord have undertaken to provide stone and clay, for repairs of the meeting-house. Mr. Curwin has promised to provide for covering the meeting-house five hundred nails, and is promised to be paid to his content.” This house continued, as appears by the records to accommodate the “congregation” until 1670, when the second house was built, of sixty feet long, fifty feet wide, and twenty feet stud, situated, according to the records, “at the west end of the old meeting-house, towards the prison.” The town gave the land to set it upon. On the 17th August, 1672, the town “voted, that the old meeting-house be reserved for the town’s use, to build a skoolhouse and watch house,” and be carried “into some convenient place, where it may be re-

formed for the town's use," and it was further voted that "the old pulpit and the deacon's seat be given to the farmers," who were then erecting a meeting-house at the Village. The stones of the underpinning of the old meeting-house and the clay are given to Mr. Fisk. The "clay of the old meeting-house" has probably reference to the floors, which were no doubt made of clay,—boards being scarce, as there were but few saw-mills in the Colony at that early period: this custom of clay floors is still common in the cottages of Scotland and Ireland at the present day. On the 10th of June, 1712, it was proposed to fit up the old watch house, which was built, as we have seen, from part of the old meeting-house, as a place "for teaching reading, writing, cyphering and navigation." "Now the whole house is converted into a school-house, or into two school-houses, being formerly fitted up for a schoolhouse and a watch-house." This school-house continued in the town's use to May 19, 1760, a space of forty-eight years, when the record informs us a "*new school-house*" is to be built *not* on the same spot as the *old one* in School Lane. "School Lane" is said, in the town records, to have been *afterwards* Court street, and is *now* Washington street. This *old* school-house was situated, says tradition, to the northward of the old Hunt house.

With this entry about the location of the *new school-house* and the town records, which are all missing from May, 1760, to May, 1764, and no doubt the missing part contained the record of the disposal of the old school-house. Had this record

been preserved, any tradition, would have been unnecessary and superfluous. As it is, however, all that is known from 1760, of the old house, is from this source; and there is every reason to believe it was then disposed of, and that Thorndike Proctor, who was at this time a conspicuous man in town affairs, Selectman and Moderator of Town Meetings, and Grand Jury man, bought the oldest part and re-erected it on his own land, back of what is now Boston street, where it was used as a tavern or a refreshment house. Here it has slumbered undisturbed for a period of one hundred years. The tradition is to this effect, obtained through Caleb Peirce, Esq., and comes down to us from the Pope family, and from Benja. Proctor and his sister, who are the lineal descendants of the said Thorndike Proctor. Mr. Peirce says:

“Joseph Pope, the first of the name who came to New England, was in Salem in 1636; his name appears on the Salem records about that time.”

“Joseph Pope 2d was baptized in 1650, married in 1669 Bethusa Folger, aunt to Dr. Franklin.

“Enos Pope, son of Joseph 2d, was born in 1690; he lived near the Fowler house in Boston street. In 1718 he built the house now occupied by Mr. Wilkins, at the foot of Gallows Hill, which was within a few rods of this old building in which Enos 2d was born in 1721, and who died at the age of 92. Enos 3d was born in 1769. My recollections of my grandfather, Enos 2d, are very clear and distinct. Until a few months of

his death he was very active, clear-minded and communicative. He was frequently inquired of by people with regard to previous events, and he was so exact in his account of dates and particulars, that it was supposed he had kept a journal for many years, which was not the case.

“I remember his pointing out the course of the old road, which passed the tavern house and joined the present street directly opposite his house. With Enos Pope 3d, I lived nearly forty years. He was full of information and anecdotes, and yet very cautious and careful in his statements. It is from him and his sisters, who lived in the family long after their father's death, that I got the account. It was never doubted by them. It should be remembered that the persons I have named were separated only by death, although very long-lived; father, son and grandson have lived together in the same house, and the connection that bound the past to the present was never broken for a day. Two persons are now living who were born in the old tavern, viz., Benja. Proctor, aged 84, and his sister. I have just seen them, and find that they well remember that it was always known as having been made from the ‘First Meeting House.’ Mr. Proctor says he has heard his father say *so more than a hundred times*. A few years ago, I mentioned to an older brother of theirs, since dead, what I had heard of its early history, and found him much better informed than I was, and much interested in having the house preserved. It was from him I first learned that the house itself affords so much evidence of its origin.”

Thus ends the tradition. The internal evidences that the present building is the identical first church erected in 1634, are, first, the size of the building, which so completely matches the “*addition*” made in 1639, being twenty feet long and seventeen wide; secondly, its peculiar construction,—one important point being that a beam, apparently intended for the support of a gallery, is framed in from side to side at about one-third the length of the building; that upon the timber opposite to this beam are peculiar tenons, which in the opinion of a master builder, cannot be for any other use than the insertion of knees for some support, which your Committee believe was for a gallery.

The daubings upon the walls, or plastering, as we should now say, composed of clay and chopped straw, also prove the great antiquity of the building; but your Committee, not being in possession of the fact *how* the building was removed to the present location, are not clear that this work might not have been added subsequently to its removal. The great pitch of the roof, unusual at that day for dwellings, may have been so designed to give a wider and freer space in the galleries.

Upon a careful review of all the testimony, your Committee are unanimously of the opinion, that the evidence thus educed from the public records, from reliable tradition, and from the internal testimony of the building itself, is plain and conclusive.

Your Committee would, therefore, in furtherance of the duty which devolves upon them, recommend that this “*Santissima*

Casa,"—this most holy house,—be removed to some suitable place and fitted up internally and externally as nearly as possible to its original appearance, where it would be more accessible to the public, and where pilgrimage could be made to it by every son and daughter of Massachusetts who values our peculiar history and the preservation of memorials connecting us with our fathers; and as they shall stand beneath its restored and sacred roof, the words once uttered to Moses shall steal upon the mental ear, "*Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.*"

Respectfully submitted,

C. M. ENDICOTT, *Chairman*,

FRANCIS PEABODY,

GEO. D. PHIPPEN,

A. C. GOODELL,

IRA J. PATCH.

APRIL 26, 1860.

FINAL REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE

TO WHOM WAS INTRUSTED THE CARRYING OUT OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS CONTAINED IN THEIR REPORT, MADE TO THE INSTITUTE, APRIL 26, 1860.

[READ AT A MEETING OF THE INSTITUTE, JUNE 19, 1865.]

The principal difficulty with which the Committee had to contend was to find a suitable site on which to place the Church of the Pilgrims. This was finally arranged through the efforts of our late most worthy associate, GEORGE A. WARD, Esq., who was added to the committee, December 18, 1863.

The assent of the proprietors of the Athenæum having been obtained to the placing of the church on the land in the rear of the Plummer Hall, the committee decided to transfer it to this site, if, upon examination, it should be found in a suitable condition for removal.

The contract for building this church was made in November, 1634, with a Mr. Norton; the trees were felled in the winter of

1635, and the building erected during the summer of that year. Its glazed windows were not added until 1637; they were probably ordered in 1636 from England, and were paid for, according to the town records, in 1638.

Your committee were satisfied, after a thorough examination, that the frame was the only part of the building that afforded unmistakable evidence of having belonged to the original construction. They removed with care the outer covering of the building, the boards and the shingles; they marked and numbered every part of the frame; they noted the positions of the posts, braces, plates, rafters, ridge-pole, gallery-beam, tie-beam, mortises, and cock-tenants; these were carefully examined and questioned as to their story of the past; the responses were prompt, and so satisfactory to those who could understand their language, that their origin and mission were placed beyond doubt.

It was resolved to transfer these relics to their new site, and after dressing the wounds inflicted by time, to erect them into their original positions and form, that they might repeat to coming generations the same story they had whispered to your representatives.

We have raised an external structure of suitable strength, to which the ancient frame is bolted, and this frame is seen projecting on the outside of the plastering within the building. We have supported the external structure by means of sills resting on stone posts, raised from the ground to protect the

floor from decay. The floor of the original building, judging from the town records, was made of clay.

The wooden posts, so far as they remain to us, have been extended to meet the sills by the addition of timber; these extensions have been colored brown to distinguish them from the original parts. The posts then rise, and terminating in cock-tenants enter the plates, supporting them firmly in their positions. The cock-tenant is a form of tenon, universally used at that early period, in the wooden structures of England. This fact is an evidence of the period and purpose of the frame.

We have further strengthened the plates by adding strips of plank, which assist them to bear the superincumbent weight of the roof. These additions, like the supporters of the posts, are colored brown, to distinguish them from the original materials.

Between the posts are placed the original braces, which are wonderfully preserved. Lodging on the plates are the six original rafters, which bear on high the original ridge-pole so aged and infirm that it requires the aid of the plaster in which it is embedded to support it.

The rafters are secured to the plates with iron bolts, two of which are seen. These triangular frames, united by eight purlins, formed the original roof of the church; their great height above the plate indicates their purpose; they are in keeping with the early English church roof.

The frame of the gallery furnishes very satisfactory evidence of its original use as the gallery of the church, though upon the

first examination this was not apparent. In the building as we found it, the great beam which now holds up the gallery front, was raised above its present position so that the tenons entered the two upper mortises (these mortises now remain open, and are seen to be above the present position of the timber). This position of the principal beam of the structure on the first inspection conflicted with the claims of the tradition that this was the original First church; but on further scrutiny of the posts that hold up the ends of the gallery front, there was found an opening, or slot in the post, at some distance beneath the beam. This had been filled with bricks and clay, and further concealed by a covering of whitewash; by a few strokes of the hammer this filling came out, and disclosed a regularly shaped mortise, of a size to hold the tenon of the beam. The opposite post was found to have a similar mortise, at the same distance under the beam; this discovery made it certain that these were the original mortises in which the gallery beam rested. It appears that by a vote of the town, in 1672, the First church was converted into a school-house, and this gallery beam was then raised to new mortises made in the posts higher up, to establish a ceiling for the school-room. Important confirmatory evidence of the original use of the beam was obtained, by raising the floor over the ceiling at the end of the building; this exposed to view an oak-tie beam, in which the joist of the gallery rested at the time the front timber was lodged in the lower mortises of the gallery posts, thus giving to the gallery an inclination by which

a view of the preacher below was obtained. Upon examining the opposite end of the frame, no tie-beam was found, confirming our views as to the use of the beam described.

If this beam and posts had been intended originally to support a ceiling and upper floor, they would have been so framed as to divide the building into equal parts, and would have been placed immediately under the middle rafter, where they could have afforded the greatest support to the roof ; but we found them placed at about one-third of the distance from the end. The beam, moreover, is a third larger than it would have been, had two cross beams been framed to support an upper floor.

The gallery beam, as originally laid, was supported by two knees, formed out from the posts, as was usual in the English churches, built as early as 1600. This support was necessary to prevent the beam from yielding, when the gallery was filled with people. Upon changing the use of the beam, from the support of the gallery to the support of a ceiling and floor, the knees were no longer required ; one of them has disappeared, and a portion of the other remains.

The building is now supported and prevented from spreading, by long iron bolts inserted into the beam and hidden behind the plastering.

A railing has been placed in front of the gallery, and colored brown, to indicate that it is an addition made by the committee. This probably represents the position of the old gallery front ;

the ends of the posts occupy the mortises, which were no doubt in use for the original front.

And now, in closing their labors, the committee present the key of the structure to the Institute, with a sincere wish that this holy house may be preserved to those who come after us and handed down from generation to generation as a valued trust.

Respectfully submitted,

FRANCIS PEABODY,
GEORGE D. PHIPPEN,
A. C. GOODELL,
IRA J. PATCH,
C. W. UPHAM.

Upon the walls are tablets giving the names of the pastors of the First church, also photographs of the different buildings occupied by the First church.

The first meeting house built in 1634, enlarged in 1639.

The second meeting house built in 1670; no picture of this is known to exist.

The third meeting house built in 1718.

The fourth meeting house built in 1826, remodelled in 1875.

All of them occupied the present site, corner of Washington and Essex streets. Engravings of some of the pastors are also exhibited on the walls.

On account of lack of exhibition space in the Institute building a few articles of historical interest have been placed in the meeting house building, as follows :

Desk used by Nathaniel Hawthorne while at the Custom House, Salem. It is said Hawthorne wrote a portion of the "Scarlet Letter" on this desk.

Desk used by William Gray in his counting room, Salem. Wm. Gray was a prominent merchant of Salem. He was born in Lynn in 1760, and entered the employ of Richard Derby at an early age. He followed the lead of Mr. E. H. Derby in sending ships to Canton and India and in 1807, one-fourth of Salem's tonnage was owned by him. He moved to Boston in 1809, was chosen Lt. Governor, 1810, and died Nov. 3, 1825. Mr. Gray's old store is still standing on Derby St.

Desk of Nathaniel Bowditch used by him when engaged in translating LaPlace's *Mechanique Celeste*. Nathaniel Bowditch was born in Salem, March 26, 1773. He devoted much time to the study of scientific works and in 1788 at the age of fifteen he made all the calculations for an almanac for 1790. His first voyage to sea was made at the age of twenty-one to the Isle of Bourbon in the ship "Henry." He was famed as a mathematician and while Actuary of the Massachusetts Hospital Life Insurance Co. of Boston, he translated LaPlace's great work. He contributed papers on astronomical subjects to all the leading scientific publications of his day. He died in Boston, March 16, 1838.

Pew door from the Meeting House of the First church, Hingham.¹

Colonial settle, originally used in the "living room" of one of the old Salem houses, and for many years in the porch.

Communion table of East church, Salem, used during the pastorate of the eminent Dr. Wm. Bentley.

Christening stand said to have been used in Topsfield church, 1700. In some old English churches a similar stand is called "hour glass stand," so that there is a doubt about the purpose for which this was used.

Child's seat used in pew of First church, Salem, beginning of the present century.

Pew seats made of straw.

Cast iron figure used for stove radiators previous to 1820.

PASTORS OF THE FIRST CHURCH.

1629.	FRANCIS HIGGINSON.	1630.
1629.	SAMUEL SKELTON.	1634.
1631.	ROGER WILLIAMS.	1635.
1636.	HUGH PETERS.	1641.
1640.	EDWARD NORRIS.	1658.
1660.	JOHN HIGGINSON.	1708.
1683.	NICHOLAS NOYES.	1717.

¹ This church was built in 1681, but the pew door is of a later date, probably about 1750.

1714.	GEORGE CURWEN.	1717.
1718.	SAMUEL FISKE.	1735.
1736.	JOHN SPARHAWK.	1755.
1755.	THOMAS BARNARD.	1776.
1772.	ASA DUNBAR.	1779.
1779.	JOHN PRINCE.	1836.
1824.	CHARLES W. UPHAM.	1844.
1846.	THOMAS T. STONE.	1852.
1853.	GEORGE W. BRIGGS.	1867.
1868.	JAMES T. HEWES.	1875.
1877.	FIELDER ISRAEL.	1889.
1891.	GEO. C. CRESSY.	

In 1865, through the public spirit of the late Mr. George A. Ward, who was an enthusiast in all that relates to the early history of Salem, two tablets were placed on the walls of the church building now standing on the original site. The inscriptions are as follows :

I.

“On the 20th of July, 1629, a day set apart by order of

JOHN ENDICOTT,

then Governor of Massachusetts Bay, the first settlers met for the purpose of establishing a Church, which was fully organized the 6th of August :

SAMUEL SKELTON
was elected pastor, and
FRANCIS HIGGINSON
Teacher.

“Their immediate successors were Roger Williams, 1631, and Hugh Peters, in 1636.

“The frame of the First ‘Meeting House,’ in which the civil affairs of the colony were also transacted, is preserved, and now stands in the rear of Plummer Hall. It was enlarged in 1639. The second Meeting House was built in 1670, the third in 1718, the fourth in 1826,—all on this spot.”

II.

“The Provincial House of Assembly, convened in the Court House, which stood on the contiguous lot now included in Washington street, Resolved on the 17th of June, 1774, that a congress of the ‘several colonies on this continent is highly expedient and necessary,’ and elected delegates to said congress. Governor Gage forthwith dissolved the House. An election of a new House of Assembly was ordered by the Governor, to convene in the Salem Court House. The members of that body, on the 7th of October, 1774, transformed themselves into a Provincial Congress which assumed sovereignty; thus terminating all political connection between Massachusetts and Great Britain.”

In 1892 the city had placed upon the exterior wall of the present church building a bronze tablet bearing the following inscription :

HERE STOOD FROM 1634 UNTIL 1673
THE FIRST MEETING HOUSE

ERECTED IN SALEM.

NO STRUCTURE WAS BUILT EARLIER
FOR CONGREGATIONAL WORSHIP
BY A CHURCH FORMED IN AMERICA.

IT WAS OCCUPIED
FOR SECULAR AS WELL AS RELIGIOUS USES.

IN IT PREACHED, IN SUCCESSION,
I—ROGER WILLIAMS: II—HUGH PETERS:
III—EDWARD NORRIS: IV—JOHN HIGGINSON.

IT WAS ENLARGED IN 1639, AND
WAS LAST USED FOR WORSHIP IN 1670.

THE FIRST CHURCH IN SALEM,
GATHERED, JULY AND AUGUST, 1629,
HAS HAD NO PLACE OF WORSHIP BUT THIS SPOT.

An illustrated article on "Salem," in *Harper's Weekly* for August 5, 1871, says :

“Nowhere in this land may one find so ancient and worshipful a shrine. Within these walls, silent with the remembered presence of Endicott, Skelton, Higginson, Roger Williams, and their grave compeers, the very day seems haunted, and the sunshine falls but soberly in. The visitor seems to close the door upon the bustle and complacency of his own time, and by some subtle spell of sympathy to find himself standing at last in mute and intelligible relations to the firm, integral life to which he owes so much. Quaint and in keeping as are the visions that the suggestiveness of the place conjures from out the resources of his memory, there is yet in them all no longer so bald a sense of Puritanic affectation or constraint; the bare timbers of these narrow precincts evince a necessity that was in itself denial; and he remembers vividly, as if for the first complete time, that the souls that met God here were sadly weary of a colder intercession.”

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